MY JOSEPHINE

Written by

Barry Jenkins

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"My first short film, photography by James Laxton, as always. Still my favorite. Written shortly after 9/11, wasn't actually made for another year because of the way things shook out in school. Inspired by three things: the marquee of a Tallahassee laundromat shortly after 9/11 reading "American Flags Cleaned Free," an image in my head of two people sitting atop folding tables, and my housemate at the time being obsessed with Napoleon. We were very young men when we made this film."

- Barry Jenkins

First, over BLACK, we hear the faint sounds of a laundromat.

Then:

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
A seven minute film about my life.

1 EXT. LAUNDROMAT — NIGHT 1

AADID, 22, Middle-Eastern, standing outside a neighborhood laundromat empty save for a few patrons strewn about here and there. Hanging behind him is a NEON SIGN that reads AMERICAN FLAGS CLEANED FREE.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
It's funny how... there are no streets... or buildings... op monuments named after Napoleon Bonaparte in Paris... or any city.

He pulls a cigarette from his pocket and lights it.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
Most people know little about Napoleon. They know he was a conqueror, a tyrant.

As he exhales a long drag, Aadid looks directly at us, oblivious to our watching, inside his own thoughts.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
Few people know that Napoleon had two wives. Josephine, his first, he married as general. And Mary-Louise, his second, he married as emperor.

Aadid breaks our gaze and turns his back to us. Through the glass, inside the laundromat, we see...

ADELA, 20, also Middle-Eastern, beautiful.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
Mary-Louise, for an heir. Josephine... for love.

Aadid watches Adela through the glass adoringly.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
Adela. My Josephine.

She's conversing with a MIDDLE-AGED MAN. An American flag is in a wad under his arm. Adela reaches out and takes it.

1 CONTINUED: 1

Continuing the conversation, she unfurls it and begins to fold it neatly.

2 INT. LAUNDROMAT — CONTINUOUS 2

MIDDLE-AGED MAN
Is that it?

ADELA
Do you have anything else?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN
No.

ADELA
Your name?

Adela removes pen and paper from her pocket and jots it down.

ADELA
It'll be ready in the morning.

She tears a piece of the paper and hands it to him.

3 EXT. LAUNDROMAT — CONTINUOUS 3

Aadid turning from the scene and leaning against the glass as the MIDDLE-AGED MAN breezes past. Aadid takes his last drag flicks the unfinished cigarette to the ground.

FADE TO BLACK.

4 INT. LAUNDROMAT - NIGHT 4

Adela wandering the laundromat. She stops at a row of top-loader washers and wiggles her key into one of the machines, opens the coin box and grabs a handful of change.

5 EXT. LAUNDROMAT - CONTINUOUS 5

From afar, we watch Adela exiting the laundromat, her hands cupped and full of quarters. She crosses the parking lot, cradling the change in her hands, passing from our field of vision just as Aadid steps onto the laundry porch.

Aadid leans against the glass wall, just as he had earlier, looking after Adela.

Resting on a bus bench, THE HOMELESS MAN is semi-conscious, just woken and still lying across two-thirds of the bench.

5 CONTINUED: 5

Adela motions to the bum to cup his hands, and exchanges the coins she has from her hands to the bum's.

The bum counts the change, a coin at a time. Adela watches endearingly, hypnotized.

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
You learn to like night shifts.

6 INT. LAUNDROMAT — NIGHT 6

Aadid and Adela, stone-still statues in front of the laundromat. They're sitting in CHEAP WHITE PATIO CHAIRS playing a game of chess. Behind them, through the glass, we see...

LAUNDROMAT PATRONS moving at lightning speed, excited electrons loading machines and folding clothes.

They cycle through washing, drying, and folding frenetically. We observe them until they all disappear.

FADE OUT.

7 INT. LAUNDROMAT — LATER NIGHT 7

Adela dumping a bundle of AMERICAN FLAGS on the counter.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
We've cleaned flags free for five months. It works.

Adela dumps the flags on the counter and sorts through them.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
There's never very many... six, seven, eight. We get them every day, clean them every night.

She clamps NUMBERED CLIPS to each one and reloads the cart.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
They aren't hard to clean. People run them up in the morning, take them down at night.

Adela pushes the cart of flags through the laundromat, Aadid at her side.

7 CONTINUED: 7

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
Something that never touches the ground shouldn't be dirty.

8 INT. EMPTY LAUNDROMAT ROOM — CONTINUOUS 8

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
It's a delicate thing.

Aadid and Adela stand beside each other at a large sink. They each have both hands submerged. Soapy foam wraps their wrists.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
The colors mustn’t bleed. The white stars must be kept from the blue field, the red stripes from the white.

Aadid and Adela's hands wave softly beneath the water. The flags swell and swim around them. There's a play to it all.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
You don't scrub them... you barely touch them. You're always gentle.

Aadid and Adela continue their work.

9 INT. LAUNDROMAT — NIGHT 9

Aadid and Adela atop adjoining washers.

AADID (ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
What were you talking about?

ADELA
Talking about when?

AADID (ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
With the homeless man?

They pause. Adela focuses her eyes on the counter below.

ADELA
About love.

AADID (ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
In Arabic.

ADELA (ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
About love.
(in English)
What’s wrong with English?

9 CONTINUED: 9

AADID (ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
Nothing.

To this last question Adela does not respond. She simply stares at him, letting the moment linger.

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
Adela is a woman who is very good.

10 INT. LAUNDROMAT — NIGHT 10

A MONTAGE OF:

Adela standing in the center aisle, staring at us. Slowly, at odd intervals, she takes steps towards us.

Adela, sitting behind a register reading by warm lamplight.

Adela's feet, one before the other, floating down an aisle.

ACCOMPANIED BY:

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
She's simple. She's not complicated. She’s not someone who makes up schemes. She's very gracious. Lovely.

Aadid and Adela together in the laundromat. They’re embraced, hip-to-hip, hand in hand, performing a waltz. Neither is very good at it. The smiles on their faces suggest they’re aware of this.

11 INT. LAUNDROMAT — MOMENTS LATER 11

Adela crouching behind a washer at the end of the center aisle, an extravagant WATERGUN in tow. Across the laundromat, at the opposite end of the aisle, Aadid crouches beside a dryer with a similar WATERGUN.

Adela slides across the aisle, parallel to Aadid, and hides behind another washer. As she settles, Aadid turns towards her and makes his way down the aisle, closing in.

Adela squirms behind the washer. She swivels her body round the corner of the washer and down the next aisle.

Methodically, with poise, Adela eases up from her crouch and peers over the aisle. Aadid does the same. He’s dead in her sights, at her mercy and loving it.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: 11

Aadid lowers his gun and raises his hands. She smiles and a fondness pierces their standoff. Then...

Adela triggers her gun. She explodes with laughter as Aadid rounds the corner and chases her down the aisle. They careen past the washers and bend down a row of dryers.

Adela's running while twisting backward to fire at Aadid, joyously screaming. They continue through the laundromat and into the empty parking lot, guns drawn. They circle one another.

12 INT. LAUNDROMAT STOREROOM — NIGHT 12

Aadid and Adela on opposite sides of the tiny storeroom checking INVENTORY. They both have a CLIPBOARD AND PEN.

Aadid is on one side of the room and Adela another. He counts a stack of cartons and marks his sheet. Adela does the same.

As they both turn to move, they meet under the light. They embrace. They sway. Their lips meet. They kiss.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

13 INT. LAUNDROMAT — NIGHT 13

A LAUNDRY CART floating down the aisle of the Laundromat. We are in this cart, propped atop the folds of DAMP AMERICAN FLAGS.

A wall of dryers approaches us. We observe as a flag is lifted from the cart and hoisted into the dryer.

14 INT. LAUNDROMAT — MOMENTS LATER 14

Adela and Aadid facing the dryers, leaning against washers on opposite aisles. They pull change from their pockets.

Working their way down the row, they each load change and start a dryer.

They stand back to watch the American Flags tumble and spin, each one in its own space in this sea of dryers.

DRYER'S POV

Aadid and Adela, staring at us, seemingly unaware of our watching as we twist in the dryer's rotation.

14 CONTINUED: 14

The laundromat revolves around them. There's an air to this we've not experienced before. Neither speaks, but we hear:

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
Every flag, its own dryer. A delicate tumble. Low heat.
(a pause)
Sometimes, you can help but stare at them.
(another pause)
It makes you feel...

CUT TO:

Aadid and Adela atop a row of washers, together, cradled beside one another.

AADID (V.O. ARABIC, SUBTITLED)
...like you should be in love with something.

FADE TO BLACK

15 INT. LAUNDROMAT — DAWN 15

The laundromat, dim against the day-lit exterior. Light creeps along the floor and fades away down the aisles. It's serene; no patrons, no piles of clothes, only empty washers and freshly swept floors. In the farthest aisle, Aadid and Adela.

Silhouetted, they stretch a crisply folded AMERICAN FLAG between them. Adela releases it to Aadid and drifts toward the front door. She stands there in its threshold.

Aadid folds the flag into its final shape and lowers it gingerly to the counter. His face, though somewhat tired, reflects a calm the freshly folded flags suggest.

Aadid turns from the counter to take in Adela standing in the morning light. He watches her as though touched by something ethereal. She's beautiful.

He drifts towards Adela, crossing the threshold to stand beside her. Their backs to us... slowly, nearly imperceptibly, they each float a hand across the threshold until...

Their hands meet.

FADE OUT.